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The Matter of Things

The arguments for the use of a slide projector and analog technology fail vis-à-vis the end result. In other words, the digital projector, much like the digital camera, or, for that matter, any other advanced technology, simply surpasses its predecessor. The quality of the digital projector's lamp, the ability to change between different platforms at the touch of a button (e.g. from a computer screen to that of a DVD player), the ability to switch from a spatial to a temporal dimension, the quick connection to the web, the inexhaustible amount of information, and mainly the unbearable lightness of portability – all these render the slide projector a superfluous link in an evolutionary chain.¹ The digital projector's high cost is a symptom of a simple market economy, and as such, it is bound to drop. Kodak's decision to stop producing the analog projector in 2003 was thus a chronicle foretold, and at any event – natural. Hence the question arises: what is the place of the slide projector in the beginning of the third millennium? Is it but an organ on a historical and cultural axis? And as such, should the slide projector and the art created thereby be studied through a historical prism? Or an archaeological prism? All these are apt questions, and the answer to them appears to be "yes, but." "But," because the end result, and necessarily the aforementioned questions concerning it, play a modest role in the discussion of the slide projector. Its ability to be relevant, or if you will – current, stems from its presence, its objecthood, its visibility and contiguity with the projected image, and – in contrast to the digital refinement – from its "awkwardness." Thus, to a large extent, the analog slide projector ought to be regarded

1. Rem Koolhaas regards modernism as fertile, not unbrilliant ground for an inconceivable number of projects which evolved rapidly, and found their way into history's "junkspace" at similar speed (Koolhaas refers mainly to architecture, but his assertions may be read in other, broader contexts as well). The computer "spells the end of Enlightenment," he maintains. How ironic and literal when one considers the redundification of the projector by digital

technologies; see: Rem Koolhaas, "Junkspace," *October* 100, Spring 2002, p. 175.

2.

Discussion of such a sculptural setting must be aware of the fundamental dispute between Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss, as arising from Krauss's book, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. The projector or the light, according to Krauss, is theatricality's *raison d'être* for better or for worse; it is the actor himself. Krauss's assertions ought to be understood vis-à-vis Fried's hostility toward theatricality in art: "I want to make a claim which I cannot hope to prove or substantiate but which nevertheless I believe to be true: viz., that theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with art as such...". [Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998)]. The projector, or the way it is used by artists, is, according to Fried's doctrine, a sore evil, posing no less than an existential

through the discourse of sculpture, or to be more accurate – through that of an intricate sculptural environment, one that presents a long tradition of sculpture and a discussion thereof via its constituent elements: from the projector's mounting, like many sculptures, on a pedestal, through the discussion of the three-dimensional and two-dimensional, light and darkness, theatricality and formalism, to sentiments, sentimentality, and alienation, which are often the fate of the projected narrative.²

Recently, as I groped in the dark to turn off the slide projector, my fingers encountered the small fan located near the on-off switch. The blow, more than causing a real damage, took me by surprise, nearly rebuked me for my lack of alertness and impudence in sticking my fingers where they don't belong. In its own way, the slight pain taught me that each violent act on my part, to release a stuck slide, has a potential counterpart, equally aggressive, on the part of the projector. Such a two-sided procedure derives from an intimate situation, from a position where an "act" is the consequence of thought and its realization in the same space and the same time; from a place where any kind of mediation is eliminated. I often think of the projector's intimacy, of its materiality; the basic quality inherent in its operating mechanism, one that virtually any technical layman can follow, and sometimes, when the need arises, even fix (how true a saying it is about the projector, that "what you don't solve with force, you'll solve with more force"). I think of the heat spreading through the ventilation slits, warming one's hands on a cold day, and the very same heat, unbearable on a hot day; of the monotonous noise, the humming of a fan and the sedative strained tapping of the mechanical apparatus. I think of the inverted transparencies, of the slight insult taken at their "correction" which repeatedly fails as nervous, trembling fingers keep inverting the inverted, furnishing the audience with a comic relief. I think of the various kinds of dust, the one cumulated in the depths of the attic, and the one intertwining with bodily particles, burned by the heat

threat to art. Krauss, on the other hand, holds that "in trying to find out what sculpture *is*, or what it can be, it has used theater and its relation to the context of the viewer as a tool to destroy, to investigate, and to reconstruct"; see: Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 203-204, 242.

of the lamp, deconstructing into different, differentiated smells; I think of the slide's celluloid, which melts, leaving an unmistakable plastic smell of a burnt image. When I think of the slide projector, I think of a body.

The intimacy created when we share our bed with another person has its advantages, as well as its drawbacks: cold feet, insufficient blanket, drooling on the pillow, foul breath, sleep-talking. When a slide projector takes part in a work of art, an intimate sculptural setting is created. A non-sterile environment, one interrupted by the monotonous "muttering" of the projector, an environment that "reeks of its breath," one that conceals a myriad of latent whims threatening to break forth at any given moment – such as the burning of a lamp. The choice of an analog, as opposed to digital, slide projector thus does not seek to boast what it (the projector) can do; it is not a choice endeavoring to conceal the medium and extol the product. On the contrary. Such a choice embraces the "drawbacks"; it presents them openly, hiding nothing, since every shortcoming, apart from being charming, further teaches us a thing or two about the tradition of sculpture, of representation, and indirectly – perhaps precisely through consideration of theater – also about life.